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Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by Gray Panthers, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

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Statement

Gray Panthers is honoured to submit the present statement to the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2010 of the Economic and Social Council on implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women and the Development Cooperation Forum theme "Development cooperation in times of crises: new commitments to reach the Millennium Development Goals".

The Millennium Development Goals have eight international development goals that all 192 United Nations Member States have agreed to achieve by 2015. The goals include eradicating extreme poverty; achieving primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development. The time is only five years away from the target date, and it seems to be unreachable. The global financial crisis, the food crisis and the climate change crisis add more challenges to realizing the Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality and women's empowerment is the way to a successful solution. Women of all ages play an important role in reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS and eradicating extreme poverty.

Women continue to be treated as inferior to men, especially in developing countries. They are disadvantaged in education, financial resources, health care, land ownership, access to information technology, employment opportunities, social activities and decision-making positions (18.8 per cent in parliaments worldwide and 7 per cent in official negotiation delegations). This is especially true for older women. Yet women are responsible for the life of the family. They put food on the table. They are responsible for taking care of children and the elderly. Sometimes they travel long distances to fetch water, food and firewood in order to feed the family. In 2005, more than half a million mothers died as a consequence of childbirth. Low-income countries account for 83 per cent of all deaths of children under five, as reported by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat.

Education plays a vital role in gender equality and leads to better income as well. In some African countries, children of mothers who have spent five years in primary education are 40 per cent more likely to live beyond the age of five. Statistics show women reinvest 90 per cent of their income in their families and communities, compared to men who reinvest only 30 per cent to 40 per cent. Giving women financial and social opportunities equal to those of men is the key to community development. Funding for reproductive health care and family planning can cut down maternal mortality and child mortality, as well as prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission. Promoting gender equality can decrease domestic violence and violence against women.

Gray Panthers believe that gender equality and empowerment for women of all ages is the key to development and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Equal representation of women in policymaking positions ensures that women's voices are heard. The United Nations needs to hold nations accountable by working with parliaments, local governments and the private sector. With the involvement of the whole community and non-governmental organizations, the internationally agreed goals of the Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action can be reached.